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Letter to the Editor

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**MAKE IMPACT ASSESSMENTS PUBLIC
FOR SAKE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE**

Sahabat Alam Malaysia calls on the federal government and relevant agencies to make public, impact assessments such as social impact assessments (SIA), traffic impact assessments (TIA) and radiological impact assessments (RIA), and seek feedback prior to their approval.

An SIA and TIA are required for relevant development projects prior to the grant of planning permission under the Town and Country Planning Act, 1976 (TCPA), while an RIA is needed under the Atomic Energy Licensing Act 1984 in dealing with radioactive waste, prior to the grant of a license for keeping such waste.

Currently, none of these impact assessments are made public or require public feedback or comments prior to the grant of approvals by the relevant authorities.

Although the SIA process does involve some consultations with those likely to be affected by the project, how these concerns have been taken into account and addressed in the impact assessment is not known or made transparent.

We believe that these impact assessments must follow the procedures that exist in relation to environmental impact assessments (EIA) under the Environmental Quality Act 1974, where public participation and feedback are required for major projects with serious impacts, prior to any EIA approval.

Moreover, it is also not possible to view such impact assessments as there is no requirement to make them public.

Having impact assessments done and not making them public for comments beforehand is not good governance and does not augur well for transparency in decision-making.

Take the case of the Light Rail Transit in Penang, which is of major controversy in the state. The SIA or the TIA are not public and concerned citizens are not able to view the findings and conclusions of these assessments.

How can authorities expect the public to have confidence in the decisions they take if such assessments are not subject to independent scrutiny?

The same is the case in the current on-going controversy over the Kampung Bohol flood retention pond in the Federal Territory. The SIA and TIA for the proposed housing project in the area should be made public so that there is independent scrutiny as to the adverse impacts on the communities nearby.

Further, in the case of an RIA involving radioactive wastes, which have grave and serious implications on human health and welfare, it is imperative and prudent to make the impact assessment public to provide the assurance that all health and safety concerns have been considered and public comments and independent scrutiny have been provided.

By doing so, public confidence and trust in the decision-making process can be assured. Otherwise, a lack of transparency gives rise to doubts as to whether decisions are being made properly or behind closed doors, to advance the interests of big corporate players and their powerful backers.

We hope the federal government will heed this call and take all the necessary measures for greater transparency and accountability in decision-making.

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